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Reed makes her mark as Eagle firefighter

Angela Reed doesn't want to work with anyone who's not capable of saving her from a burning building.

So she doesn't expect her fellow firefighters to settle for anything less.

Reed is the first woman hired as a career firefighter by the Eagle Fire Department in more than 20 years, since Sandy Caple served with current Chief Dan Friend in the early 1980s as the department's only two full-time members.

Reed had to complete the same training and pass the same physical tests as the 21 full-time men.

"You don't make a smaller Jaws of Life (life-saving equipment)," Friend says. "She does the very same thing They're expected to be able to use the same equipment, lift the same weight, do the same training."

"I don't want an allowance," Reed says. "I don't want an exception. The guys expect that of me, and I expect that of myself."

Reed, 34, served as an Eagle volunteer firefighter for two and a half years before she was hired on full-time with three other firefighters in April.

"That's the only way to become a career firefighter in Eagle," Friend says. "We recruit

volunteers and we promote from that volunteer pool to the career positions as they become available." He says a few of the current crop of 80 volunteers have been trying for seven or eight years to become full-time.

Reed says she's always been physically active, thrives on being a lifelong learner and embraces change. "I like coming into something and making it better than I left it," she says. "I want to make sure I've made a difference in somebody's life."

Three years ago, she wasn't finding any of that from her job in the collections department of a local call center. Then she recalled a conversation with a smokejumper friend who had suggested she'd make a great firefighter.

The single mom of 7-year-old Allahna threw herself into her training. She studied while working full-time (and sometimes a part-time job, too).

Now she's trained as an EMT, wildland firefighter, water rescuer and driver engineer. That means she can drive the fire engine when the regular driver isn't on shift.

"It's great," she says with a big laugh. "It's a lot of fun. It's kind of frustrating that people don't acknowledge (the lights and siren). If this was your house or your family, you'd get out of the way.

"I've felt nothing but absolute support from everybody at the fire department," she says, adding that the only way she's treated differently is that her male counterparts tend to watch their language when she's around.

The firefighters work 24-hour shifts. The Eagle fire stations have separate bedrooms for each person; everyone takes turns using the single-occupant bathroom with shower.

"I don't have family here, so it's great to have all these big brothers," she says. "If I won the lottery today, I'd step down from the career (spot) so somebody else could have the position. But I'd still volunteer."